

A Letter to a Friend concerning the late Answers to a Letter to the Dissenter.

Dear Sir,

38.

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225.

YOU have infinitely obliged me in sending the several Answers to the Letter to the Dissenter: For notwithstanding the many Reflections upon the Church of England which I find there, yet I cannot but heartily laugh to observe how afraid some people are lest the Dissenters, those especially who have most Money as well as Understanding should like that better, and be a little aware how they are made Tools to do mischief both to themselves and others. But that which pleaseth me most of all is to find that those two Incomperable Worthies Sir R. L. S. and H. C. whose former writings had like to have set the people together by the Ears, do now lovingly accord together to the Satisfaction of the whole Nation, and notwithstanding their former Fews and Bickerings can now write both on the same side.

Nor do I see any such necessary contrariety between Infallibility and Liberty, saith H. C. p. 11. Why then this Liberty and Infallibility truly understood and rightly distinguished may very well stand together; and the holding the one Opinion does not at all clash with permitting the Exercise of the other; saith Sir R. L. S. p. 7.

Whereas we see many many places where both Papists and Protestants live very quietly together, saith H. C. p. 3. To say nothing of the freedom they are allowed in divers places where they live intermixt, saith Sir R. p. 10. There is a great difference, quoth H. C. p. 29. between repealing a Law, and relaxing or dispensing with the Penalty. The first can only be done in Parliament, the latter has been always adjudged to be part of the Royal Prerogative. The King, quoth Sir R. suspends by his Prerogative, but a Total Repeal must be the work of his Majesty in Parliament, which does not yet hinder the Temporary Virtue of a Temporary Suspension.

When I consider these and the like Passages, wherein our two Patriots to the welfare of the Publick do now so happily agree; I could not at first keep out of my mind a foolish Suspension, that these Gentlemen were certainly two of the Mediators of the new Alliance, which the Letter to the Dissenter makes mention of, and that all their former Jangling was only in Jest and by Agreement. And, to tell you all, the temptation was very strong upon me for a while, to believe that besides the common work which they were both employed about, they meant nothing else by their pretended Quarrel, then to obtain some modest Allowances for their necessary Occasions, the one from the Church of England, and the other from the Dissenters. But I soon blamed my self for suspecting that Men of their Integrity and Fortunes could ever be perswaded to condescend to so mean, not to say so unworthy an Undertaking.

At last consulting Sir R. about it, I found him to have salved the Difficulty, p. 12. where he tells, that according to a change of Circumstances, a Man of Principles may vary his Judgment with a respect to Hic and Nunc, as to some particular: and consequently that in how great Esteem soever they may have formerly been there may be a time, wherein one Book called Tolleration Discus'd may be of no use at all, and another called the Pacquets of Advice shall be quite out of Season. For Then was Then, and Now is Now.

But whatever may have caused this Alteration, which happens to appear in these Gentlemen's Writings; it gives me occasion to be very merry sometimes, with some of their wonted Admirers: For whenever I get some of my Tory Parsons neer me. Behold, cry I, your Observer pleading for Liberty of Conscience, and for Accomodations; does not this deserve a second contribution? ----- And no sooner are they gave, and some of the Non-Cons (with whom I am acquainted) come to make a Visit, but I presently fetch out H. C's Answer. Look you Gentlemen, say I, the Papists are not such cruel people as you imagined, and you were basely abused in the Weekly Advices which you were wont to receive from Rome.

Both Parties scratch their Heads upon this Occasion, and some endeavour to defend their Writings; but others swear they will never trust any of these mercenary Scriblers for the future.

But the best of all is this, that notwithstanding this strong Confederacy of these mighty Men against a poor single Letter; they are not agreed of what sort of Kidney he is who wrote it.

H. C. will have him to be an highflown persecuting Church of England Man; but Sir R. insinuates p. 26. as if he were a Dissenter, or at least a Dissenters Fellow.

But



But be he who he will it is both their Opinions, that his Design is nothing but to stir up Fears and Jealousies, and therefore that it is as much as the Dissenters Lives are worth to mind one word what he saith to them.

Now let a Writer be what he will, when so much Pains is taken, and by such different Tools, to bring about what it seems that Letter would abstract: were I a Dissenter, I should be a little tempted to consider the Purport of it. And if so many Thousands thereof have, as Sir R. asserts, been sold, the Printer is most of all beholden to the Number as well as the dulness of the Answers to it.

But certainly R. is most of all to be blamed in reference to the spreading of it; for he has caused it to be Printed almost intire, as well as added a foir to set it off.

I suppose I shall be accounted at least a Trimmer for talking at this rate. But one would think that according to Sir. R's meaning of that word (who makes a Trimmer to be one who is always ready to change with the Times) he himself was much more so. For his Judgment it seems can alter *pro hic nunc*: and notwithstanding for three whole Volumes of Observators, who at last so kind as he and a Dissenter?

And why may not my Answer be Addressed to a Dissenter too, p. 2. Ay why not to a Dissenter? my old dearly beloved Dissenter? And then as if he would hug him to Death at parting he concludes, *dear Sir, your most affectionate humble Servant.*

As for the other meaning of the word Trimmer, whereby I always understood one that was for making the Terms of Communion as easie as he could, and for allowing such a Liberty as might be consistent with the publick Safety; I care not who thinks me such a one. And although I do not pretend to promise any thing in the behalf of others, yet I am apt to believe that many of our best Divines both are and have all along been of the same Mind, and had it not been for Men of such a temper as Sir R. L. S. and H. C. and the College in a certain place beyond the Seas for the propagating that Faith; things had tended that way long before now.

Is it not pleasant to observe that in the very same Paper one of these should be able to detect a Conspiracy of Common-wealths Men; and the other a Plot both of the Latitudinarian Divines and high-flown Church-men; That the one should find fault with the Author thereof for his Moderation, as being therefore no Genuine Son of the Church of England, and the other insinuate as if no moderation were intended: and because his wonted Clamor *No Popery, No Arbitrary Government*, will now take, stretches his Throat with bawling *No Persecution, No Persecution*.

I meddle not with the subject matter of the present debate, the *Tugs* and *penal Laws*, but I could be glad to have none of us mind what the *Knaves* and the *Beggars* say concerning them. For these alway wrest every thing to the worst sense, widen the Breaches, which honest Men endeavour to close, and are not so much concerned for Truth, as what they can get most Money for Writing.

For the rest of the Answers to the Letter which you sent me, we are very much beholden to the Authors, for discovering the many undoubted Characters who they are, for they are neither colouring dissenters as H. C. is, nor half faced Church of England Protestants, as is Sir R. but downright honest Papists. This same Letter thought I has brought good Company together.

As to the *Dissenters*, notwithstanding this noise about Persecution; I hope they will be so wise as to consider from whence the orders about it came from time to time: and likewise what were the times and seasons when it was most set on foot, that for secret reasons they have had their worse and their better days, as if they had been one while swung off to sowre them against the Church, and another while stroaked that they might live to remember it: Lastly, that when any of the Church Party talked on the severe side, the reason of that was no secret. Whilst Polling at *Guildhall* for such as had once overturn'd the Government, it could not be expected but that it should give occasion to some who were zealously concern'd for the present Establishment, and for the welfare both of his present and late Majesty, to be more hot against them than otherwise they would have been.

But if neither the Consideration of these things, nor of any thing else can deter them from doing what is intended they shall, nor from dividing the Body and the Interest of the *English* Reformation.

All the harm I wish is, that they do not at the long run bring that both upon themselves and others which they are at present so much concerned to avoid. ——— So hoping that this account of these Two Worthies may be no ways offensive to Government

I am yours S. F.